Preparing and delivering technical presentation is no easy task. This class will help to eliminate the fear of presenting a technical presentation, whether it’s for a technical conference or for clients in the boardroom. You will learn how to effectively prepare for a technical presentation, including how to research the topic(s) and how to practice. You will also learn how to effectively deliver a technical presentation by not only delivering sound technical content, but also by reaching out to the audience members and tapping their emotions so they will be more likely to remember what is said and leave with a positive attitude.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this class, you will be able to:

- prepare for a technical presentation by effective research
- prepare for a technical presentation through practice
- deliver a technical presentation by expecting the unexpected and preparing a set list
- deliver a memorable technical presentation by reaching out to the hearts and minds of the audience
About the Speaker

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Introduction

Preparing for a class at a major technical conference is no easy task. Take it from me I know. I’ve been teaching classes at technical conferences for about five years now. One thing that I have learned is that you need two special ingredients in order to make a conference presentation successful. The first is you need to have technically solid material and secondly you need to be able to deliver that technical content in an interesting way and an engaging way to the audience. This presentation is going to summarize how you actually do those two things in five easy steps.

In this course I will present and recommend that you (as the presenter) follow 5 steps simple steps on both how to prepare and how to deliver a technical presentation. I will also include how ‘I” has accomplished these steps in the past in front of an audience. It will be up to you if you want to apply my methods or make up your own. Just because I do it that way does not mean you have to. This course was not intend to have you present and preform like me.

This presentation is really geared towards a technical conference and preparing for a technical conference and delivering a presentation at a technical conference however some of the tasks that you find in here could be applied to a presentation that you would do in a board room or in front of a client.

Preparing for a technical presentation and delivering a technical presentation takes a very long time. If it’s done right it will take you about six months. I like to think of you (the speaker) as an athlete in training for the Olympics and you could think about the event or the technical presentation as the actual Olympics. So it is important that you prepare and you train yourself just like an athlete would for the Olympics.

What is important to remember with the technical conference is that everyone in the audience are already technically savvy so you can’t trick them with a lot of technical talk and think they will not see right through you. They usually come to a conference to get a question answered and they expect you as the presenter to answer that question. This means that there is a lot of expectation upfront from the audience. That means if your presentation is not technically solid than you run the risk of the audience poking holes in it and losing your credibility. So it is essential that your first task is to make your presentation technically solid and that is done thru preparation and practice or the time before the actual presentation.
5 Steps on How to Prepare for a Technical Presentation

Number 5 Research

Research and choosing your topic
When you are preparing to give a technical presentation to a conference you must first select your topic. This will happen usually six months in advance from the presentation itself. That is a long time but it gives you enough time to do the proper research on your topic and to make sure that you convince yourself that this is the topic that you want to present on.

What topic to choose?
You need to make sure when picking a topic that you are completely passionate about the topic. Let's face it, technical presentations are by nature, boring because they are filled with data and button clicking, if you have a live demo. Therefore, you already have an uphill battle on your hands to make the content interesting. One way to make it interesting is to pick a topic that you love and are passionate about. The audience will notice you are passionate and will likely be more interested in the topic.

You need to make sure that the industry needs to hear what you have to say about your topic so choose a topic that the industry is asking for and that they want to know more about. This will also make the audience more interested. The last thing you want to do is present on a topic that has never been done in the same way. So you need to convince yourself that what you have to present is pure gold. If you feel that way about it then it's easier for the audience you will be presenting to will feel that way about it too.

When I choose a topic for a conference I ask the industry what you need.. When I first became Revit user in 2008 I would consistently hear that complex geometry was not able to be built within the Revit environment and as a Revit user I thought how true that because I never created any complex geometry. I decided to take it upon myself to figure out if it could be done and I was able to model these two families in Revit, the elephant that you see in below and the cow also shown below. Once I convinced myself that it could be done then I decided this would be something that industry should know.

“...you need to convince yourself that what you have to present is pure gold”
I was also told that no one could model complex geometry using topography elements inside of Revit or dirt. Once I convinced myself it could be done as shown below, I decided to teach a
class as well’s at Autodesk University. I also heard that you couldn’t create elements and scale them inside of Revit easily or morph them easily and that’s what you see in figure 4.
Look for RED FLAGS

Once your topic is picked, you have to ask yourself, how do I research my topic and why should I research my topic. You research your topic because you want to know more about it. You also want to know what has been done in the industry on your topic. The best way to start your research on a topic is to do a simple Google search. If you have proposed a topic at a conference or if you were going to present a topic and you did not Google that topic then you're selling yourself short.

At this stage you are going to want to be looking for any red flags. A red flag could be something that someone has done in the past that is exactly the same as your topic and that you would not be covering anything new. Another red flag is a method that you have come up with that you want to present that is completely wrong. Another red flag is the message you have come up with is more complicated than a method that someone has else has come up with that yield the same results. Get those red flags out early.

I myself have found a topic that actually had a red flag on it. This is a true story I actually started writing code that would eventually be turned into an add-in for Revit a particular topic that dealt with work sets. I was almost finished with it then I talked to a colleague of mine and he casually mentioned that the latest and greatest version of the software actually had that functionality in it.

Make sure to check the “What’s New” Feature on the latest Software that you are presenting about.
Forum Posts
Another way I researched topic is I will create a forum post and I will ask very specific questions about that software. For example if I’m am going to present a class on Dynamo I’m going to ask what is everyone’s experience with Dynamo how easy is it to use and where are the typical issues. Most importantly I will ask how people feel about the topic.

I have found that forum posts actually draw out some of those emotions out of people. And when you get people to tell you how they feel about a particular topic. You really learn more about it and how important it really is and how it impacts their lives.

Below is a sample forum post.

Watching Others
As part of my research I not only research the technical part I also research how others have done presentations in the past. I enjoy watching presentations on Autodesk University online as well as Ted talks just to see how other presenters present. I have spent dozens of listening to some of the great speakers from Autodesk University in the past including. I learn a lot from the presentations and I ask myself these questions; how they begin the presentation? How do they entertain and engage the audience? How do they concluded the presentation?
Rejecting Rejection

I thought it be important to talk about submitting that topic as an abstract to be accepted at a conference. I’m sure most of you attendees have submitted abstract at one time or another.

Just remember if your class gets rejected for a conference that doesn’t mean that all of the time you spent researching it is wasted. What I do if my topic is rejected I will find other means at which to introduce it to the public and the industry. I will create an article in an industry magazine. Or I will give the presentation at a smaller conference.

But really I wanted to talk to you about how to handle rejection. If your class is rejected it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s over. And what by I mean by that is it cant hurt to ask the selection committee why it was rejected.

I’ve had a personal experience with this I’d like to share with you. In 2012 I proposed a class on how to make complex geometry using Revit. It was rejected. I then planned to teach that same class at another conference (RTC). It turned out that the person that rejected my class from Autodesk also sat in that class at RTC. Once I was done presenting she immediately came up to me and said that she rejected this class from Autodesk University. She enjoyed the class so much she wanted to un-reject it and include my class in the Autodesk University 2012 schedule. I was so excited I gladly accepted. That class ended up being voted top class at AU in 2012 at a total of 600 classes that were taught that year.
Now fast forward to 2013, I propose two classes to be presented at Autodesk University 2013. I found out in the middle of the year that those two classes were rejected. I was a little bit surprised that the classes were not accepted. I thought this time of the flight back a little harder. All I did was send out one twitter message and it basically said the following “my classes for Autodesk University 2013 were rejected I guess Autodesk does not want their top speaker to return” Many people who responded with their own opinions about how I should have been accepted. This went on for two days. On the third day I received a call on the phone. It was the content manager from Autodesk University. He told me that they wanted to un-reject my classes and it was rejected on accident. It was a mistake and that they always intended for me present at Autodesk University 2013. He then on rejected my classes just like in 2012 and added them to the schedule. The first of those two classes shown below was also rated the highest lecture class of 2013 not only did it get the highest rating it also got the highest rating ever out of the 21 year history of Autodesk University.
The second class shown below that was un-rejected had the second-highest score 2013. The lesson here is don’t give up. Could you imagine what happened would have happened back in 2012 if I would have given up, no 2012, no 2013 top classes and most likely no class in 2014. In the end of the day I had someone ask me are you mad at Autodesk for rejecting your classes? I said I am happy for them because they un-rejected them.
Choosing your “Set List”

Every good technical presentation has a set of concrete examples to help illustrate the topics. I refer to them as a set list because the list of examples that you choose is like a list of songs that a band would choose before they go out on stage and perform. If you’re a presenter you are an entertainer and it’s important to choose the right set lists.

A good set list will have a wide range of possibilities. The order in which you have your set list is also important. You want to put the most interesting and complex set list item at the end of your presentation. You also want your simplest to be at the beginning.

I like to put the most complex set list item at the end of my presentation for two reasons. The first is a like everyone to walk away with what could be possible if you took this method and push it to its extreme limit. Also you’ll want to save your best material for last similar to how a band plays their hit song at the end of their concert.

There’s no easy way to pick a set list. What I do is I don’t just pick an example that works technically but one that is interesting, engaging and relevant. We will talk about this more later but a set list is actually a moving target into your final preparations are completed. Expect to change your set list. And just like the best directors in the world expect to cut out your favorite examples. More on this later but there have been times where I have thrown out examples because the audience that I practiced in front of does not understand them. I will usually evaluate and throw out 75% of all the examples that I have tested. If your technical presentation is a hands-on lab then the examples could also be used as your lab exercises.

“...don’t just pick an example that works technically but one that is interesting, engaging and relevant”
Number 4 Make Time

With all of our busy work schedules and family commitments it is very difficult to find time to research and prepare a technical presentation. There’s a few things that I do to ensure that I have enough time to prepare for my presentation. With that in mind a long time ago I made the commitment that I would not let conference preparation get in the way of my work or my family. So with that said the following is how I make time to prepare for presentation.

First and foremost I spend most of my time preparing for my presentations at night after the family is asleep usually between 10pm to 1 AM. That’s the time I get to sit down in front of the computer. Also, I create and organize my content in my head on my long commutes back and forth from work. So if you have a long commute just keep in mind there is potential for you to get a lot of preparation done. With that said when I have a long commute ahead of me I get very excited because it means I can get a lot of work done!
**Number 3 Test the Technical Content**

After research you’re going to want to test your technical content and how it works on your computer. I test all my technical content over and over again. I ask myself does this work in every situation? The best way for me to make sure I have all my bases covered is I pretend that I’m a heckler in the crowd and I’m trying to discredit the presentation and the presenter by any means necessary.

Testing your technical content is technically a form of practice but you don’t need to be in front of a mirror or necessarily speak. You need to go through the motions of the presentation that deals with the mechanics and the technical issues. There are potential red flags that you can find when testing your technical content. Sometimes the information is no longer relevant because it changed in the later version of the software. Did someone say Dynamo? Also make sure you look at the “What’s new” section in the latest software to make sure you incorporate all that new information or be prepared in-case the question comes up about it.

I have found that presentations that don’t have technically sound content fail miserably. At this phase are going to want to make sure that your content is technically sound. I have even gone as far as having colleagues test by methods and listen to me talk about them so I can get feedback.
Number 2 Practice the Presentation

Practicing is essential. This section will not talk about specifically how to practice but rather when to practice and where to practice. When I say practice I mean practice the presentation not practice the technical content that was in the previous section. You will want to practice your presentation with the set list that you have set up already. Practicing helps get your confidence level up which means you’ll be less nervous when you’re actually giving the live presentation. Practice really sets the timing and how your voice will correspond to all the material in the presentation.

I like to think of practicing as a dress rehearsal for the live presentation. This is the time to make mistakes and correct them. This is how I practice before every technical presentation. I will practice the presentation in front of a mirror because this will show me how my body language is. In the next section we will talk about how body language is important in order to engage the audience.

I also record myself making a presentation. Nowadays it’s really simple you could use a computer recording software such as Screencase by Autodesk. Screencast is free you could get more information at the website (https://screencast.autodesk.com/)

When you record yourself the fun begins. It only helps to record yourself if you’re going to actually watch yourself at a later time. When you watch yourself make sure you pay attention about how your speaking. If you’re speeding up or slowing down no need to correct that. And don’t worry if you get embarrassed. It’s natural. I get embarrassed when I watch myself though I think about it this way and it makes me feel better. I am the only one watching myself and there is no one else in the room so what is there to be embarrassed about. I tend to have a lot of fun when I watch myself and I record myself all make jokes or notes to myself to say things later. And watching yourself is a big time commitment. If you are giving a 90 minute presentation and you have to record and watch yourself several times that hours and hours of replay time. What I do is record audio as well and listen to the presentation while I commute.
Next you’re going to want to practice in front of a live audience. This is essential if you have an opportunity to do it. The best places to practice your presentation are at local user groups, at a lunch and learn at your company, or at another conference. I actually use all three of these places to practice my presentation and sometimes practice my presentation up to four times before I actually give it at a conference.

It’s important to practice in front of a live audience for many reasons including being able to get live audience feedback you cannot get that by just practicing in front of the mirror.

Live audience feedback will help you determine if the examples that you chose were to hard or too confusing or too short. Live audience feedback will also help you determine if your jokes are funny.

You are watching on how the audience responds to your set list and if it is unfavorable or they don’t get it then you will need to adjust your set list accordingly. Now is the time to change the set list because you don’t have time to do it during the actual presentation.

I myself have actually thrown out examples that were too confusing to the live “practice” audience. If you cannot present in front of a live audience then perhaps consider presenting as a webinar. I’m sure many of local user groups would enjoy having you participate even remotely in a presentation.

When I practice I actually take it to the next level. When I think of practicing I think of simulating audience participation as well as simulating the presentation itself including the environment in which I present. It is not uncommon to have hardware failure or a file to go missing or some other unexpected phenomena to happen. It is also not uncommon to get audience members to not be “respectful”. I look at it as it is my job to be prepared for such things and I will try to simulate the situations in a live presentation. There have been times when I’ve asked the local user group I’m practicing my presenting at to sabotage my hardware without my knowledge or to heckle me to see how I would react it. Try it it’s a lot of fun!
Number 1 Make a Great Handout and Presentation Slides

Handout

The handout has to look great, get right to the point and be technically solid all in one so it’s no easy task to create one. Keep in mind the following when creating a handout.

- The audience will NEVER EVER remember everything you say, and the handout will allow all attendees to refer back to it to find out what was covered in the presentation.
- The handout is also used as a companion during the presentation to help attendees follow along.
- The handout is used as a reference for others to find out what the presentation was about who did not attend the presentation.
- The handout is also used by attendees at a conference to choose if they want to attend the conference because the handout is a tool for them to get a summary of the class.
- Keep in mind that the typical handout reader will do the following
  - Skim the figures with their eyes
  - If they see an image they find interesting they will try to decipher the “idea” of the article from the images
  - If they are really feeling daring they will read the or words around the image
  - If they want to find out more from the caption then the read the paragraph near it
  - If they still want to find out more than they can go to the appendix
Make sure to include figures. If you have a method makes sure to include on the figure itself as shown below. That way when someone looks the figures they know the steps to take. Also your figures should have interesting images and ones that tell a story of what the handout is about. As you can see in this image that is from my handout on complex geometry and Revit in AU 2012, it shows an organic shape and it shows that at different scales.
Also in creating a handout remember the following:

- Save the long winded text for the appendix, yes I recommend an appendix because... you want the handout to look impressive even though most people will never read it.

- At some Conferences including Autodesk University because... you are graded on the handout so make it look pretty. I personally create a hardcopy of my handout and bring them to the presentation as shown below.

- Make sure someone Proof Reads it for you.
Slides

I have learned over the years that it is more important to present technically strong content than to have flashy presentation slides.

Sure you can make your presentation out of per the lot of animations but at the end of the day what really matters is how you present the topic. So my big word of advice is do not waste your time on how the PowerPoint slide should look. Make sure that the PowerPoint slides summarize each speaking point and elaborate on each one and do not just read the slide.

My boss had me change a presentation I was going to give to clients from a static powerpoint presentation to a flashy Prezi presentation. My boss was thinking we needed to “wow” them with the presentation and that it could not be accomplished by the static slides. My boss at the time and many others had the preconceived notion that what mattered were the slides and not the actual “presentation”. After I gave the flashy Prezi presentation I learned quickly that all that “flash” didn’t matter. What mattered was how we made the client feel and that is unrelated to how flashy the presentation slides turned out.

Live Demo or No Live Demo?

I personally use PowerPoint presentations for technical presentations only to show what I am going to cover. I then switch to live demonstrations through 80% of my technical presentation. I do this for two reasons one it’s a much easier way to connect with the audience to show them that what you’re doing is possible and it doesn’t make the presentation feel “canned” in anyway.

A lot of people have mixed feelings about if they should demo or not demo but it really depends on your style. In lieu of live demonstrations I have seen pre-recorded demonstrations that are played during the presentation this is good as long as you talk thru the pre recordings. I have seen a presenter just play the pre-recording and not say anything. Although personally I feel if you can touch the software it makes it more believable with the audience and it helps them believe they are able it to. If you’re trying to tell a story with the dimension of time I would recommend creating an animation. As shown in the figure below.
4 Steps on How to Deliver an Engaging Presentation

Intro

All that hard work of preparation is about to pay off. It is time to deliver the actual presentation. The following will describe what to do once you walk into the presentation. This is the moment you’ve been working towards. It is the day of the Olympics. I get nervous every time before I speak. What helps me calm my nerves is I keep in mind that I know this material more than anyone else because I spent the last six months preparing for it…or however many months…or days… or hopefully not minutes before the presentation. The primary goal of the presentation is to get the audience engaged and excited because they will more likely remember what you said. The best technical content does not mean anything if you are not able to present is a favorable way.

Number 4 Set the Mood at the Beginning

Establish a positive atmosphere early because you want everyone in the audience to feel comfortable. Before the presentation people will be starting to file into the room and sit down. Make sure you have something up on the screen preferably an intro slide of some sort that says the title of the presentation and your name. You want to make sure people are in the right presentation.

Music before the start

You really want to get everyone pumped and excited about the material. Let’s face it technical content in and of itself is not that interesting. Who’s getting excited about button clicks really? It is your job as the presenter to make it exciting. Before the presentation even starts when everyone is starting to filing into the presentation, I like to play music. It’s a good way to start to set that mood. I recommend if you’re unsure what music to play then don’t play anything. I like to choose music with a beat to get everyone pumped up and ready to go because it’s a lot like a rock concert. If lyrics will offend people try the instrumental version of the song.
Show up Early
Make sure that you show up very early because you want to make sure that you have enough time to set up. Also you want enough time to talk to the audience before you actually start. You also want to show up early in case there are any problems with people getting into the presentation you could help with that and it shows that you care.

Work the Crowd
Work the crowd, just like a rock concert, by walking around and talking to people. This will help them understand that it will also give you a who’s going to attend sometimes interview what they expect out of difficult know what

It’s not that critical to try your opening statement. has a good idea of what that important to try and you have to present is feel that way they would

You don’t need to have gimmicks with opening statements because you are not trying to sell something or at least it should feel that way to the audience.

“Don’t worry about grabbing the audience’s attention within the first few minutes, worry about maintaining it during the presentation.”

For the most part, the audience you’re going to talk. So it’s not convince them that the material important to them. If they didn’t not have attended.
How to start
Skip the winded intro. I have been guilty of this in the past. Most people are familiar with what you've done and if the audience is not familiar there's usually someone who introduces you before you present. Say your name, the title of the presentation, the company you work for and what you are going to cover.

Use the set list, shown below, as the outline of what you are going to cover and tell the audience this early on. I always felt it advantageous to go over what I will be presenting. There are people in the audience who will want to decide if they should stay based on what you're going to cover.

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**OUTLINE SETLIST**

**5 STEPS ON HOW TO PREPARE FOR A TECHNICAL PRESENTATION**

- Number 5 Research
- Number 4 Making Time
- Number 3 Test the Technical Content
- Number 2 Practice the Presentation
- Number 1 Make a Great Handout (Take away) and Presentation Slides

**5 STEPS ON HOW TO DELIVER AN ENGAGING PRESENTATION**

- Huge Intro (Technical really means Software Demo)
- Number 5 The Beginning Setting the Mood
- Number 4 The middle Engage the Audience
- Number 3 The middle Show your excitement for the subject and other tips on presenting
- Number 2 Management of the Room
- Number 1 Other Considerations and Closing

APPENDIX ADD FUNNY STORIES
Number 3 Engage the Audience

Now that you have finished your intro it is time to start your actual presentation. You need to engage the audience and you need to make sure that what you are saying is coming from your heart. I realized quickly that it is people’s emotions that you need to reach out to and make them feel like you care. That is how you get the audience to remember your presentation. All you need to do is keep them interested, active and feeling like you care about them. When I am at a conference, I ask people I know when they leave a presentation, what they thought about it. When the presentation is uneventful I get an answer such as “it was ok” or a little shoulder shrug. When the presentation was engaging or made them feel good the answer is almost always “that was amazing!” So the point is you want to engage the audience to turn this comment “it was ok” to this comment “that was amazing!”

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou
Move Don’t stay still
Move around when you present and don’t stay still if possible. Move towards the audience even if you are doing a live demo. Don’t get stuck behind the computer. Whenever I make a presentation I’m constantly moving back and forth between my computer and addressing the audience by walking forward to them. You don't want them to fall asleep on you as shown below.

Knowing your Audience

The easiest way to engage an audience is to ask questions. Before I start a presentation I always poll the audience to find out who is actually in the audience. Worst thing you can do is give a presentation to individuals who don’t care what you have to say or that your presentation does not apply to them. The audience wants to know the following: How does this apply to me? What could I actually learn from this presentation? I have a problem at work and I want this presenter and this presentation to solve it.
Adjust to the Audience
You need to adjust to the audience. This is not easy for it requires you to make slight changes to your agenda on the spot. Do they find the material interesting? Is it relevant to them? If it’s not than you need to change direction. Don’t freak out if people leave.

From my experience I have noticed up to 10% of the audience leave the room. People have reasons for leaving that have nothing to do with how you are performing on stage so don’t take it personally. However if you notice more than 10% leaving then you need to start wondering what you are saying (or not saying) that could cause people to leave.

Let me tell you a story about the worst presentation I ever attended. I attended a class at a large conference where the topic of the presentation was taking concept designs then on to the completed projects. I expected the presenter to explain how to get from something that was conceptual or conceptual shape to the finish building and everything in between. This presentation had almost 400 people in attendance. The presenter would show a slide of a concept design or simple shape and then show a slide of the finished building. There were no slides for the material in between that explained the process. Over and over again there were slides of a simple shape and then a slide of the finished building and nothing in between. Slowly people start walking out of the room one by one. Within about 20 minutes almost 100 people left the room. This was a 60 minute presentation and about 30 minutes in 200 people left the room I myself decided to leave at about the 40 minute mark. It turned out that there were about 50 people remaining in their seats when the presentation ended. Yes that’s right they went from 400 people to 50 people.

Let’s talk about what went wrong with this presentation.

- First the presenter was not well prepared. It was obvious that the presenter did not spend a lot of time preparing the slides or considering what the audience expectations were in being able to meet them.
- Secondly the presenter talked in a monotone voice and hardly moved around the stage so in that regard it was very uninteresting.
- Finally the presenter at no point in time decided to ask the audience why so many of them were leaving.

If I was giving a presentation and I noticed more than 10% of the people leaving I would ask the audience if there is something I’m missing or why are so many people leaving. Adjust to the audience.
Treat it like a discussion not a Presentation

I like to try and have the audience feel like the presentation is like a discussion as shown below. This helps engage the audience because they feel like they are participating and not just a static observer. What I do is I ask questions. To get your audience answer the questions is a little more difficult. I have a few techniques that I liked I employ. But before we get to that let’s talk about questions and if you should allow them to be asked by the audience.
To Ask or Not to Ask (why do people worry about questions being asked?)
A majority of the time, the first thing any presenter I have encountered would will tell the audience is to please hold questions until the end of the presentation.

Why? I am guilty of this. AU 2012 when I taught my class on complex geometry I said the same thing, but I quickly realized during the presentation that people have a lot of questions. I felt it was unfair not allow questions so I allowed them to be asked. I realized from that point on I would not prevent people from asking questions whenever I presented.

Also I have had evaluations from attendees that have commented that I should not have allowed questions during my presentations.

Why? Now let me ask you (the reader) a question. As an attendee why you are worried of questions are asked during the presentation? Are you worried that the questions would disrupt the flow the presentation? Are you worried that the presenter would not be able to finish all the material because they’re bogged down the questions? Are you worried that the presentation would veer off track and never come back because of questions? What if I said that if done properly all of those concerns could be dealt with if the presenter was allowed to manage the room and the questions correctly? Would you as an attendee then allow questions? Is it really fair to say that you don’t want to have questions asked when you may have questions yourself?

In the later segment I will discuss talk about how to manage the room and I will give you some tips on how I managed questions that come up. Also as a presenter I would like to see a lot of hands raised for questions as opposed to no questions. This would indicate that everyone was interested, engaged and wanted to learn more. So I say “raise those hands” and ask.
Tell them to heckle you

So how do you get the audience to engage and ask you, the presenter questions? When I was practicing my presentation at the LA Revit User Group in early 2014, I told the audience to heckle me and gives me a hard time. It was all in good fun and I wanted to try to practice to see how I could handle those types of situations.

But something wonderful happened something I didn’t expect it all. In fact no one heckle me instead I had people ask questions that in the past have remained completely silent. It was as if I said to them “feel free to ask any question you want and you will not be judged and no one can hold it against you”. This was puzzling so I tried it again at the Portland Revit user group in July 2014.

The same result, the audience was engaged and a lot of people ask questions and a few people who have never said anything before in the past starting ask questions. Wow! I thought I stumbled onto something amazing here. From now on when I present I am going to allow any questions and heckling to occur because it brings out more questions in the audience becomes more engaged. So if you are not able to get the audience to engage try asking them to heckle you.

Repeat the questions it’s not just for the recording

Let’s talk about what you should be doing when someone asked question. The most important thing you have to do is you have to repeat the question. Even if the session is not being recorded or streamed live to others who are not able to hear the question being asked.

If you don’t repeat the question then what happens is the question and answer session ends up as a conversation between the presenter and the person that asked the question and ultimately everybody else is left out. I like to think of questions as supplemental information to the actual presentation itself.
You are there for them, not they are there for you

If you want to engage your audience you need to make them feel comfortable, and know that what you are saying is coming from your heart. You want the audience to feel like you are there to help them.

Back in 2012 I got one negative comment on one of my evaluations at Autodesk University. And it simply said this person is full of himself. At the root of that comment to me meant that that person was feeling like I was selfish. That comment hit me really hard because that was furthest from the truth. The whole reason I give presentations is to share information or one of the reasons. And I failed as a presenter to convince everyone that I was there to help them and I wasn’t being selfish.

So the next year I told myself that I could not give off that impression of being selfish. I tried something very bold. I turned my presentation completely around. From that point on I told everyone that I was proud of them for attending that they were my heroes for being there and learning. That was exactly how I was feeling and that is what I told the audience and as a result I did not appear selfish.

So when you’re presenting you need to leave your ego at the door and remember you are there for them they are not there for you.
You need to show that audience that you spent a lot of time and effort
Show the audience that you spent a lot of time and effort on the presentation because it makes the audience feel like you prepared and care about the topic.

Don’t say things which are negative in which make people think that you did not spend a lot of time prepping for the presentation. Never say this, “I been doing this presentation for years now and I'm just giving it to you today and this is the same one I been giving year after year after year after year”. Also don’t say things like this: “I threw this together last night or last minute”. That will definitely make people think that you don’t care.

What not to say

Also don’t say something like this: “This material is boring” or “I don’t really care about this material” Or “I was forced into doing this presentation”. Those types of statements make the audience feel like you don’t care so why should they care. Also if you are presenting at a conference that requires you create handouts don’t say something like this: “The handout are not ready, I will give it to you sometime next week” or “I wrote the handout last night and it doesn’t have a lot of information in it”. You have to make them think that this is the only task you have on the entire planet and that you put your heart or soul into preparing for the presentation.

Also if you give live demonstrations make sure you share your data sets. This is important because everyone wants to try this stuff at home and if you share it people think you care.
Show you are excited about the material
If you want to get the audience excited about the material then you as the presenter have to show that you are excited about the material. Showing my excitement is one of the things that I make sure I do when I’m making a presentation as shown below.

How do you know you are Ready? Pick a Topic you are Excited about
In order to show that you’re excited about topic you need to prove first to yourself that you are excited about the topic. I know there are some presentations where you are a presenter and you are forced to give a presentation about a particular topic. Let’s not talk about those situations. Let’s concentrate on the situations where you actually get to choose a topic to present on.

How do you know you’re excited enough about a presentation? I have come up with a method that I use to test whether a topic is worthy of being presented by myself at a presentation. This test basically establishes two things first it establishes if I’m excited about it and to tests whether there is a need for. If you can satisfy those two things, then it is worthy enough to be a topic for presentation. I like to call the test the “fire drill”.

The test goes like this; imagine that your presentation only exists on your flash drive that you left at your place of business. You were quickly evacuated from your place of business because of emergency fire drill. But when you left you forgot your flash drive that had your presentation on
with your topic. You realize this and want to go back in the building but the emergency personal at the door will not let you in. Here’s where the test is.

You need to convince that person that your presentation that only exists on a flash drive in your office needs to be saved and the rest of the world would be a much better place if you were able to present it. Do you think you have what it takes to convince that person to let you in? You would need to make sure you were excited enough to get them excited enough to risk your life to save it. Think about that.

**Tell them how you feel**

What I found be very helpful is to tell the crowd how I’m feeling, the good feelings I mean. If I get excited about something during the presentation then I tell them how excited I am. If I am frustrated about a particular part of the software that I am demonstrating then I tell them I am frustrated. How I feel and telling the audience makes me connect with them on a personal “down to earth” level.

**Palms Up**

In order to engage the audience it is important to know how you are using your body language. Personally I’m not an expert on body language but I do know what has worked for me in the past and that is to talk with your palms up. It’s a gesture that will make the audience feel that you are not being threatening in any way. If you are not threatening then the audience is more likely to follow along with what you are saying and telling them to do. This is very helpful in a technical presentation because you are usually telling the audience to follow a particular method. Speaking with your palms up has been studied in the past just type “palms up body language” in the Google search engine and you will see numerous studies on the subject.
Joke and keep it light hearted

Joking and keeping it light hearted is something that is not easily taught. I joke all the time in my presentations because I always feel like when I present to an audience I’m having a lot of fun and when I am having a lot of fun I like to joke around. Not saying you have to joke around it or be funny but if you do it you have to be very careful that you don’t offend anyone. The safest thing to do is fun of yourself. When I make fun of myself I usually will joke about things that I’ve done in the past and how I felt. Also another thing I like to joke about is the software or the technology that I’m using and demonstrating at the presentation. Most people can relate to that because they are at the presentation to learn some technical information about particular software or technology. Typically the audience that uses the software that you are presenting about has at some point been frustrated with it and if joke about that then they are quick to relate. There is one more thing that I do joke about commonly and that is the workplace. Most everyone in the audience has a work environment that at times can be frustrating and it’s easy to joke about it because everyone can relate.

Another reason why I joke is because I like to keep the presentations light hearted and happy and funny all the time. If I’m not joking and keeping the presentation light hearted the tendency of the audience is to think that it is not a fun presentation. And if the audience is not having fun it’s more difficult for them to pay attention and to participate.

Getting audience to respond to a joke or something that you’re trying to say in a funny situation where you need laughter is not an easy thing to do. People laugh at something that’s funny if they feel happy and if others around them are feeling happy.

I think of laughter and joking is the same thing as getting applause during the presentation. Typically my presentations will have applause at some point during the presentation only because I have stopped and I have expressed how important something is and the audience agrees with me then I will typically get applause. If I find that an audience agrees with what I am saying and thinks applause is not appropriate they will not clap. But once one person claps then most of the time most of the audience will join in. So how to you get the audience to applause? Simple, just plant a plant in the audience.
Plant Plants
What do I mean when I say “plant a plant”? A “plant” or what I also like to refer to as a “ringer” is someone I know in the audience who helps get the applause or laughter started. It may seem like it’s tricking the audience but I see it as a primer to get the audience going. You got to make sure though that your plant is paying attention the entire time. I have tried to get people I know to be the plant in my presentations then I found out when I paused for the applause they were on their phone or not paying attention. Make sure you get someone who knows what you’re talking about when you say could you please be my plant if you decide to use one.

Beyond that I don’t use any type of fake or tricky methods to get the audience to buy what I’m saying. What I mean is I’ve never had my plants ask scripted questions. I’ve never had my plants strike up conversations with others in the audience about how good I am as a presenter or how they need to fill out the evaluations after. It’s really important to me that my feelings of how I want to help the audience are genuine. If too many things are scripted it doesn’t seem genuine in my opinion.
Number 2 Manage of the Room

What will you do if you had a hardware failure? What if you have someone who is heckling you? As the presenter the audience is expecting you to manage the room and therefore manage these types of situations. Below are some items or issues that could potentially happen during your presentation and how I manage them.

Expect the Unexpected
When you make a presentation you need to expect the unexpected. Anything can happen while giving a presentation and you need to be prepared because the show must go on. What happens if you had a hardware failure? What would happen if your computer stopped working? What happens if you couldn’t find your file? What happens if your monitor on your computer went out? What happens if the projector stopped working? What if your microphone stopped working? These are just the hardware issues.

Are you truly prepared to have the show go on if anyone of these situations were to happen? How do you prepare yourself in case one of these failures was to occur? Fortunately most of the time when you’re presenting at a large conference major technical issue could be resolved because there is an on-call technician on-site. If your microphone stopped working or if the projector stopped working there is usually a technician on-call who will be able to assist. The question is what you do while the situations being resolved. Do you sit there quietly? Do you continue speaking? Is it even possible to do a presentation with a blank screen?
Practice Technical Failures too

I have found that the best crisis is to remain calm and to your problem and have they’re solving the problem if nothing happened. How do practice speaking with a practice to make sure that I situations. Just like I have heckle me during my a live audience I’ve also presentation to somehow equipment in one form or thing to do during a technical make sure you find a solution someone help you. While continue your presentation as you do this? Practice it. I blank computer for example. I practice speaking with a blank computer for example. I practice to make sure that I remain calm during crisis situations. Just like I have asked for the audience to heckle me during my precious sessions in front of asked the organizers of the “sabotage” my technical another.

I cannot stress enough the importance of bringing up backups. I bring backups of backups. That way in case the data on my computer is missing or gone I have a backup. In case my backup which usually is flash drive is corrupted or doesn’t work I have a backup of that as well. I also have a contingency plan in case the back of the back of doesn’t work. It’s not ideal but what I do is I prepare myself to give the entire presentation without a data set where I need to start everything from scratch if I was using a live demonstration of the software.

Another thing I have done is given a presentation when the computer projector has gone out. I have found the worst thing you can do is allow the audience to sit in silence while you work through a technical issue that really slows down the momentum of the presentation.

So expecting the unexpected can really help you keep your stress levels low when faced with the technical crisis situation. During a Technical failure I never let the audience sit in silence for too long, remember the show must go on.
Stay on Time

Make sure you stay on time. The audience expects you to start and end on time. When I present I’m very conscious of time. In fact during my presentation I will make sure the audience knows that I am conscious of time because during the presentation I will say “how we doing on time?” One of the most frustrating things I could do to an audience is not get through all your material and later tell them I didn’t have time to finish. It’s not an easy thing to finish on time. If you want to stay on time in most situations you need to adjust your presentation as you’re talking.

I make sure that I have a backup plan in case my presentation runs too long or too short. I actually lean on the side of having too little material to present then if I have time I will add topics at the end. That way in case I’m moving too quickly I have enough material to fill the time. I also make sure when I make a presentation that I allow myself to cut certain sections off just in case I don’t get to all the material.
Audience Participation
We talked about the need for the audience to participate in order to have an engaging presentation. However, it is important to make sure that you keep the audience participation under control. Below are a few situations that you need to recognize that could potentially interfere with your presentation when the audience is participating. Sometimes audience members only want to be heard and they think that question time is a time for them to get on their soapbox. It is your job as the presenter to keep these types of situations under control. As a presenter you need to be respectful about the people who participate but firm about the guidelines or the boundaries at which the audience are allowed participate.

Off topic questions
If you ask the audience for questions I have found the best way to keep questions on track is to ask the audience if they have specific questions about what you have just spoken about or have shown. This way it narrows down the type of questions that are asked. I have found even when I say this I will get occasional questions that are not related to the process or method that I just showed. In these situations I quickly point out that I specifically asked for questions about what I have just shown. Also there been times when I have got a lot of “what if” questions. When I get these I’m happy because I know the audience is participating but I make sure to address the audience and tell them that if they have a comment or question is off-topic they can have a beer with me later and I would be more than happy to talk about it but the classroom setting is not the time or the place for off-topic questions.

Comments not questions or long winded questions
Quite often when I ask if there are any questions during a presentation I will get comments instead of questions. I would then tell the audience to ask questions not bring up comments. I have even once said outright “so what is your question?” to an audience member who was clearly trying to discredit the method I was presenting. This quickly establishes to the entire audience that you want questions not comments.

Another type of situation that you want to make sure to keep under control is when an audience member will take a long time to ask a question. A good guideline is if a question is being asked longer than 10 seconds then you as the presenter have to tell them to hurry the question along or ask after the session is over. You certainly don’t want to be over time because someone was asking long winded questions. Typically people in the classroom are very respectful of your time as the presenter and long winded questions are the exception not the rule. However it’s good to know how to spot long winded questions. Also if you get an audience member that does not ask the question right away and precedes question with a statement or disclaimer a red flag should go up in your mind and you need to quickly ask the question. The best way to deal with the situation is to immediately say after disclaimer something like this “could you please ask your question quickly?” Remembered always be polite.
I didn’t know I had a co-speaker

Another thing to watch out for is when you get people in the audience that do not ask questions but rather make comments to the audience and not you as the presenter. These type of people I like to call the want to be co-presenters. These are audience members who stand up ask a question or see a comment and address the audience instead of you as the speaker. The way to recognize these individuals is when they stand up and ask a question their shoulders are open towards the crowd and they are facing the audience. This also should raise a red flag in your mind and you will need to nip that behavior in the bud. If you don’t then you may get an audience that is listening to that individual and not you anymore. What I have said in the past was something like this “I’m going to have to check the class description because I wasn’t aware that I had a co-speaker” have fun with it.

Managing the Hecklers

Keep in mind that as the presenter you are the boss. If you have an unruly individual who just keeps heckling you could ask them to leave the room nicely. What I like to do when I present and have audience participation is to always remember to act respectful and be in the present. I mean to remain confident and don’t overreact with your emotions even if the questions comments or hecklers are not so nice. The good news is the result of all the presentations I’ve made I’ve never had anyone give me a purposely hard time so the chances of you as a presenter having overbearing hecklers are slim to none. Just make sure you manage the room and stay on time.
Number 1 Close with a Bang

Last to Leave
As I mentioned before, try to save the best part of presentation for last. People tend to remember the last part of the presentation and you want to be that topic that sticks with them as they walk out the door. Always make sure you tell the audience that you will be around after class and available in case there any questions.

Close with a bang
I will usually end the presentation with music as the audience is walking out of the room. This tactic works for Disney Parks. Remember when you are done with a ride you exit and there is always adventure happy music playing. When I play music at the end I want the audience to have a similar experience. The presentation is like the Disney Park ride and then there is the feel good music. Just like at the Disney Park you leave feeling happy and then they herd you thru the expensive ride theme merchandize hoping you would buy it because the ride and the send out music made put you in a good mood. Well, hopefully something similar will happen after the presentation, the audience wants to give you a great evaluation because the presentation and the send out music put them in a good mood and then just like the Disney Park the attendees are herded to the computer stations to perform the class evaluations. The point is to KEEP the audience pumped up about what they saw and so when their peeps ask them how the presentation was they will not give it a shoulder should and say it was “ok” they will say it was amazing! Good luck my presentation heroes!